

TOP SECRET

29 October 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Morning Meeting of 29 October 1969

25X1 *The Director opened by commenting on press attention given his
25X1 appearance before the Symington Subcommittee yesterday regarding
25X1 Laos. Maury noted that he now has a copy of the transcript and will
be reviewing it with the FE Division. The Director asked that Houston
also read it in particular. In response to the Director's question the
DD/P reported that [] is scheduled to return to Vientiane
this afternoon. DD/P pointed to a message indicating that Ambassador
Unger would like to see [] before his departure for Vientiane []
[] on 1 November. The Director asked Maury to apprise a staff
member of the Symington Subcommittee of [] early return to
Vientiane and at the same time to determine whether they have any
contrary idea. Later in the meeting Houston called attention to Senator
Mansfield's questions pertaining to the composition of Air America's
Board of Trustees. Houston added that he is assembling a current
roster for the Director's review.

DD/I provided the Director with an annotation of William Beecher's
article in yesterday's New York Times, "Soviet Arms Gain Detected
by U. S. "

DD/I noted that he will be seeing ACDA Director Gerard Smith
today.

25X1 []
25X1 []
[]
25X1 *Carver called attention to a cable in from COS, Saigon reporting
25X1 []
[]

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

Approved For Release 2005/11/23 : CIA-RDP80R01284A001800120039-3

is the first word he and the DD/P had on this matter, and the Director asked that COS, Saigon be advised to cooperate in every possible way

Carver called attention to the item in today's Washington Post by Robert Kaiser, "Many Feel VC Can't Recover." The Director noted similar coverage in the Baltimore Sun.

DD/S&T called attention to the Soviet test firing of an SS-11 as reported in today's publications and added that further analysis will be undertaken as promptly as possible. Executive Director commented he had heard that the DD/S&T's hearings on before the BOB examiner yesterday had gone well.

DD/S&T called attention to the U-2 test flight

L. K. White

*Extracted and sent to action officer

Approved For Release 2005/11/23 : CIA-RDP80R01284A001800120039-3

TOP SECRET

FULBRIGHT ASSAILS OPERATION IN LAOS

He Says After Hearing That
Congress Hasn't Approved
Clandestine War There

By RICHARD HALLORAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 28 — Senator J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, asserted today that the United States was engaged in a clandestine war in Laos without the knowledge or authority of Congress.

Mr. Fulbright made the allegation after a closed hearing of a subcommittee conducting an intensive inquiry into the United States' 15-year-long involvement in Laos. The Director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms, was a witness today.

While the Arkansas Democrat declined to comment directly on Mr. Helms's testimony, he said that he found nothing substantially inconsistent between it and descriptions of a clandestine Laotian army, trained and supplied by the United States, that were published by The New York Times in the last three days.

Senator Fulbright said he thought it "inconceivable that such operations are going on without informing Congress." He knew that some kind of clandestine operation was going on, he added, but not the extent.

In the Senator's opinion there is no constitutional authority for such activity and the United States has no treaty with Laos providing for it. He also accused the C.I.A. of exceeding its authority in supporting the Laotian activity.

Administration sources indicated that the subcommittee hearings had forced the Administration to begin rethinking its policy on Laos.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers, under secretary Elliot L. Richardson and other senior officials, the sources said, have turned to the Laotian question, which they had not had the time to consider because of pre-occupation with Vietnam.

Senator Fulbright maintained that the United States' activity in Laos did not come within the purview of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. The resolution, for which the Senator voted in 1964, was used by President Lyndon B. Johnson as the basis for large-scale intervention in Vietnam.

It authorized the President to take "all necessary steps, including the use of armed force," to help any nation that requested aid under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. The status of Laos under the treaty has been vague from the outset.

It was made clear by the Senator that he was not criticizing Mr. Helms or the C.I.A. out the political authorities, including the National Security Council, which had directed the agency to undertake the operation. Although Mr. Fulbright did not mention Mr. Johnson on President Nixon, his remarks clearly implied a rebuke to them as the officials who make the final decisions.

The subcommittee hearings, conducted by Senator Stuart Symington, Democrat of Missouri, are part of a review of United States commitments around the world. They come at a time when several influential members of Congress have expressed uneasiness about the possibility that the United States will slide into a deeper involvement in Laos, as it did in Vietnam.

The hearings have been conducted in secrecy. Sources in a position to be informed said that Administration witnesses had testified that the United States had no major military commitments to Laos that are legally binding.

The State Department spokesman, Robert J. McCloskey, confirmed the absence of such commitments, telling newsmen that "there is no defense agreement with Laos, written, stated, or otherwise." But he declined to elaborate on whether there were other agreements that might involve an American military presence.

Mr. McCloskey had been asked to comment on the contention by Prince Souvanna Phouma, Premier of Laos, that he had received a tacit commitment from the United States in 1964 to help defend Laos from North Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese have about 50,000 troops in Laos. The most important force arrayed against them, according to the three dispatches in The Times, is the clandestine force, which is headed by Maj. Gen. Vang Pao, leader of the Meo

The Laotian Premier, who met with President Nixon here on Oct. 7, said afterward that Mr. Nixon understood the duty of the United States — "namely to protect the independence, the territorial integrity and the neutrality of Laos."

Later the Premier told The Associated Press in Paris that he had reached a tacit agreement with William H. Sullivan, then United States Ambassador in Vietniane, on American aid. Mr. Sullivan, now a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, was the opening Administration witness when the subcommittee hearings began last week.

The sources who described the hearings said that Administration witnesses testified that the American involvement was far less than those in South Vietnam and Thailand and was primarily an adjunct to them.

The Administration witnesses, it was said, defended the secrecy surrounding American activity in Laos as an effort to maintain the facade of the 1962 neutrality agreements. Those agreements, which the United States and 13 other parties signed at Geneva, forbid the introduction of foreign troops in Laos.

Administration sources indicated the top levels of the Administration are now aware that more information on what the United States is doing in Laos must reach the public.

The sources indicated that the question will come into sharp focus when the Administration and the subcommittee debate the question of what should be made public on the hearings. The end of the hearings is not yet in sight. Congressional sources said, but a transcript is expected late in November.

The New Optimists—I

Many Feel VC Can't Recover

By Robert G. Kaiser

Washington Post Foreign Service

APBAC, South Vietnam—

Just when antiwar pressure in the United States seems to be escalating sharply, many American officials here are contemplating the tantalizing possibility that the Vietcong's revolution in South Vietnam has been defeated.

Optimism in Vietnam is a discredited philosophy, and its adherents must accept the status of discredited philosophers: One is allowed to believe that the earth is flat, but please, keep it to yourself. Hardly any American official here outside the military establishment will allow himself to be quoted by name as one of the new optimists, though a large number of them subscribe secretly to the faith.

Virtually all these officials have learned to qualify every optimistic judgment

First of three articles

with some variation of the standard post-Tet offensive caveat: "Of course, the Vietcong could still surprise us..." But many dispense the caveat insincerely, as though it were a kind of intellectual conscience money.

The new optimism has infected much of the American mission here, and it is undoubtedly reflected in the official reports from Vietnam now reaching Washington.

The "fact sheet" on Vietnam issued last week by the White House shows signs of the new mood among U.S. officials in Vietnam.

The basis of the optimism is the apparent situation in the countryside, especially in the Mekong Delta, where a third of South Vietnam's 17.3 million people live. The countryside is more fully "pacified" than at any time since the big-unit war began in 1965.

Roads and waterways that have been impassable for years have begun to buzz with commerce during the last six months. Villages long considered part of the "Vietcong society," sometimes for a generation, are now clearly within Saigon

influence and seem to be thriving on the new relationship.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens have demonstrated some faith in (if not affection for) the Saigon government by moving back to their old hamlets, joining the People's Self-Defense Force and participating in government-sponsored local elections.

The new optimists make a good deal of this apparent progress, but they are not talking about "winning the war." They are optimistic about the prospects of controlling the countryside and eliminating the military and political influence of local Vietcong. But this would not necessarily affect the North Vietnamese troops still in South Vietnam—still capable of launching offensives and prolonging the war perhaps indefinitely, even if forced to stay close to their Cambodian and Laotian sanctuaries.

Insecure Areas

Nor do the new optimists speak with equal enthusiasm about all of South Vietnam. Several northern provinces are still heavily infested with Vietcong; all the northern provinces and those along the western edge of the country—next to Laos and Cambodia—are subject to incursions by the North Vietnamese that could mean insecurity in those areas for years.

But the Mekong Delta is the country's wealthiest and most populous area, and it was the home of the Vietminh and Vietcong movements in the South. It is often said that whoever can control the lush and productive Delta will eventually prevail.

This correspondent recently spent seven days in the Delta on two separate trips, walking and driving unarmed through areas that an American would not have entered without a company of soldiers when Presidents Thieu and Nixon met last June at Midway.

On such a trip one is repeatedly nudged and told: "VC came out of the tree-

line over there and ambushed an RF [Regional Force] company last spring,"—"This is where the [American] province senior adviser was killed"—"Three months ago we would have been called crazy even to think about driving on this road"—"You're walking on land that the government in Saigon never controlled until this summer."

Gains Are Mysterious

The rampant optimism is restrained by the mystery of why the past year's progress in pacification was so easily achieved. The Vietcong have made no major effort to challenge pacification in the Delta for more than a year. Government forces have moved into hundreds of supposedly Vietcong-controlled villages without, in many cases, even being shot at. South Vietnamese officials have often been able to go into these areas, organize government programs and run local elections without the slightest harassment.

Have the Vietcong decided not to contest the pacification program? Or are they too weak to cope with it? Both theories have adherents among American and South Vietnamese officials here, though the second is much more popular.

But even those who believe the National Liberation Front has ignored pacification for the time being seem to doubt that an all-out Vietcong effort would now do as much damage as, for instance, last year's Tet offensive.

Saigon's Growing Strength

They reason that during those devastating attacks and in the 21 months since the Vietcong structure has eroded, substantially while the Saigon government's military power in the countryside has grown steadily. South Vietnam has about 100,000 more troops than it had at the time of the Tet attacks.

The boldest of the new optimists are those who contend that the Vietcong are too feeble to make a comeback in the Mekong Delta. But there are a great many officials talking that way, in-

cluding some of the best-known old hands in Vietnam once known for their criticism and pessimism. Though they are optimists now, they are talking only off the record.

"Villages we though were controlled by a company of VC turned out to have only one or two armed guerrillas," one of these veterans said recently.

Vietcong Instructions

Another old hand, who has been studying the Vietcong for four years, points to captured documents containing instructions to local Vietcong to assassinate fixed quotas of important South Vietnamese officials in the countryside. Despite these instructions, the government has lost very few important officials.

Other officials point to the reports of prisoners and defectors from the Vietcong who say that the enemy's once remarkable organization—the layers of associations and committees built on a tight base of cells—no longer exists in many parts of South Vietnam. In other areas the organization seems to be a parody of its former self. In one village in Dinh Tuong Province, the party secretary—an important figure—turned out to be a 16-year-old boy.

The zeal of the revolution also seems dissipated, the new optimists say. "When we fought the French," a 55-year-old Vietcong colonel who recently rallied to the government told an American official, "the people supported us, they loved us. But these young new cadre don't know how to win the people's support..."

Delta's Assumption

All over the Delta one hears that "time is now on our side." It is widely assumed that each week the Vietcong get weaker and the government presence becomes stronger.

The fact that American patience with the war could run out before the South Vietnamese are ready to stand alone causes bitterness here. "I wish I could show Sen. McGovern around this province," a Foreign Service officer who has been working on an important pacification job said recently. "How

could he want us to give up now?"

Men like this one (including senior members of the American mission in Saigon) who have coped with failure and frustration in Vietnam are now exhilarated by the apparent success. Efforts in the United States to ignore or to sabotage that progress anger many American officials here.

"It's good to be back where some constructive work is being done," one senior diplomat said recently after a discouraging trip to America.

The fruits of that work—be they relatively permanent or just temporary—are visible all over South Vietnam. There have always been models of successful pacification, but in the old days those were matched by models of pacification's complete failure. Now that second category is rare indeed.

Apbac's Example

This hamlet of Apbac in Longan Province is a good example of the new model. When one flies over Apbac at 1,000 feet the tall buildings of Saigon are clearly visible rising out of the rice paddies 20 miles off. Longan Province is at the very top of the Delta, but its proximity to Saigon never had much influence on its politics. The area around Apbac has been home for the Vietminh and Vietcong for years.

In 1963 Apbac became famous as the site of a disastrous battle for the South Vietnamese army. Five American helicopters were shot down in that fight, and people in the United States began asking what was going on in Vietnam.

In 1965 the hamlet fell completely under Vietcong control. Many of its residents fled to nearby towns or government-controlled areas to avoid the war, the rigors of life under the Vietcong or both.

Entered in July

Government forces entered Apbac this July. Then 600 people lived in this dirty, dilapidated little town or right around it. They were served by four small shops and an old Buddhist pagoda that sits atop the highest hill in Longan Province, a 35-foot mound of Paddy mud.

Popular Force planes built outposts in the area

and by force or default, established security in the area. Revolutionary Development cadre, the black-pajama shock troops of pacification, moved in to begin cheerleading the pacification of Apbac.

The RD cadre are masters of the showy gimmick: They paint South Vietnamese flags beside the front door of every house, put up flagpoles so every family can fly the government flag, build fences and make minor repairs. They also often reopen schools, as they did here.

The Vietcong had destroyed the hamlet's 13-room schoolhouse and used its brick and concrete walls to reinforce their bunkers, so there had been no school in Apbac for four years. When the new government officials announced last summer that they would open a temporary school, they expected about 200 children to turn out, but 523 came the first day from as far as two miles away.

Now a visitor sees young students repeating their lessons in unison and scratching out their arithmetic problems in pen and ink, as the French taught them. Because there had been no school for four years, students 8 to 13 years old are all in the same class.

Villagers Return

The large school turnout reflected the influx of former residents of Apbac that began soon after the government took it over. Now at least 1200 people are living here.

At last count there were 18 shops and the government is constructing and repairing buildings. (Damage from the 1963 battle had never been repaired.)

In the first month after government forces entered Apbac and the surrounding villages, 108 Vietcong or their sympathizers rallied to the government. Most of them were unimportant, but one was the old Vietcong hamlet chief. Another 54 suspected Vietcong were arrested.

According to the toothless old monk in the pagoda, Thien Loi, all the Vietcong officials in the area have been killed, arrested, have rallied to the government or have "gone away." Thien Loi, who has lived there for years, says that if a visitor he does not expect the VC ever to return.

VC Lacks Muscle

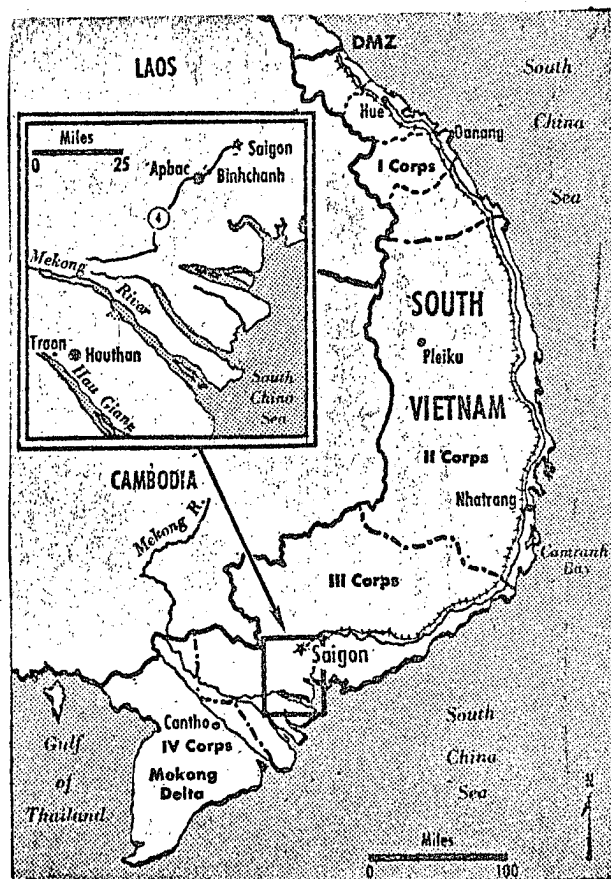
Apparently the Vietcong controlled Apbac with just a few cadre and guerrillas.

"But they used to have the muscle on hand to back them up, if they needed backing up," according to Maj. Carl Neely, the enthusiastic American district adviser in the area. "Now they don't have the muscle."

The Vietcong have made no effort to re-enter Apbac or to harass the government officials who have been here since July.

There is no evidence that the people of Apbac have become, overnight, devoted followers of President Thieu and his government. But the evidence is plentiful that they are happier with their lot now than they were as recently as the day, three months ago, that Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon.

The war is not over in Apbac. North Vietnamese soldiers are hiding, in groups of six to a dozen, in Longan Province and there are still occasional incidents nearby. But the new optimists in this part of Vietnam cannot see how the Vietcong can regain the dominant position they once held.



U.S. EVALUATION SHOWS SAIGON FORCES DECLINE IN COMBAT EFFICIENCY

Data Indicate Troop Effectiveness Takes Downward Turn In Year; Report Clashes With Optimistic Public Statements

By JOHN E. WOODRUFF
[Sun Staff Correspondent]

Saigon, Oct. 28 — The latest official American evaluation of South Vietnamese fighting ability rates the combat effectiveness of government troops in the second quarter of 1969 as slightly lower than it was in the same period a year ago.

The evaluation also says that the (South Vietnamese 7th Division became persistently less effective in combat during each of the three quarters preceding the time when it was assigned to replace troops of the 9th American Division as they left Kiên Hoa and Dinh Tuong provinces in the Mekong Delta.

This unpublished but official American view that the Vietnamese actually lost combat effectiveness since last year forms a contrast to the glowingly optimistic public statements and "background" evaluations offered to reporters by high American advisers to many Vietnamese units.

"Constantly Getting Better"

After the announcement last June that the South Vietnamese 7th Division would replace the American 9th, a top American adviser to the 7th gave reporters this assessment of its progress:

"I have been working with these troops for more than nine months now, and they are the equal of many American divisions in combat. And, what is really more important, they are constantly getting better in every important respect."

By that time, American evaluations had shown reduced combat effectiveness for the 7th Division for two consecutive quarters, and evaluations showing deterioration for the third consecutive quarter were under preparation.

Prepared By U.S. Officials

The evaluations are prepared

view of the three divisions now operating in the Mekong Delta is that all are below the national average in combat effectiveness. Reduced Effectiveness Ratings

The delta is so populous and so rich in rice that American experts on the Viet Cong say they believe that the Communists regard the delta as the chief prize of the war.

The other two divisions now operating in the delta—the 21st and the 9th South Vietnamese Divisions—also were given reduced effectiveness ratings in the most recent evaluation, although neither has been given such ratings over so long a period as the 7th.

Regarding the 7th Division itself, the American evaluation is that the persistent decline in average estimates should be taken as "a warning of deteriorating effectiveness," although many statistical factors seemed to be improving.

At the other end of the scale of South Vietnamese fighting ability is the American view of units in the six northernmost provinces, which constitute the I Corps tactical zone.

Gains In 1st Division

There, the Americans believe, high combat effectiveness was achieved long ago and is being maintained and even advanced, especially by the 1st division.

The northern provinces are considered strategically important because they border on the buffer zone between North Vietnam and South Vietnam and because they also border on the portion of Laos which includes much of the most crucial mileage in the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The official American view holds that major expansions of all armed services during the period covered diluted the already shaky junior leadership resources of the South Vietnamese forces.

Leadership Spread Out

The addition of more than 60,000 men spread the leadership out at the same time several thousand junior leaders were being removed from the Army to take positions in the rapidly expanding Air Force, Navy and regional and popular forces.

At the same time, the number of South Vietnamese Army deaths due to mines and booby traps increased across the country as the Communists returned to the conservation-of-strength tactics which dominated much of the period before the American build-up.

The losses of personnel caused

by all of these factors contributed directly to the reduction in the Army's combat rating, in the unpublicized official American view.

One of the recurring themes in the official American view of frequent references to reports that Vietnamese troops "lack aggressiveness" when actually facing the enemy in combat.

Unit's Rating Drops

This theme, which is applied to most major units, is carried further in references to one unit which was deeply involved in the battles of Dak To and Ben Het during the period covered.

That unit dropped from the second-highest combat rating in South Vietnam to the third from the bottom during the period on which the official estimate is based.

During a relatively quiet period, the unit had worked its desertion rate down to a relatively low level by South Vietnamese Army standards, but during the period included in the evaluation, the unit's desertion rate soared to more than three times what it had been.

In addition, the unit's ratio of enemy troops killed in action to the number of friendly troops killed was cut nearly in half during this period, and its "long-term trends" in operational effectiveness, leadership and personnel "dropped drastically," according to the official American view.

The official American assessment is not all gloomy and points to several bright spots,

1. A general improvement in command and control functions throughout most South Vietnamese units.

2. Continuing growth in the support and other capabilities of the Vietnamese Air Force.

3. Generally improving effectiveness in pacification efforts, although the importance of this factor may be undercut by the current effort to turn as much of the pacification program as possible over to the regional and popular forces.

4. A significant "overall operational improvement" in the strategically important I Corps zone that surrounds Saigon and stretches all the way west to the Cambodian border.

5. A marginal improvement in the overall subjective assessment of the Army's combat effectiveness during the second quarter in comparison with the first three months of the year.

Early 1969 Setback

But this tiny improvement does not begin to offset the drop in the effectiveness assessment that occurred in the first quarter of this year, as compared with the last three months of last year.

Last year, the evaluation showed improvement in each quarter, but the drop in the rating in the first quarter of this year set the evaluation back to a level below that reported for the second quarter of 1968, when South Vietnamese units were still struggling to overcome the damage done to them by the Communists' Tet offensive.

The overall South Vietnamese kill ratio for the second quarter of this year also dropped in comparison with the first quarter, thus remaining below half of that reported by American units.

Shortage Of Officers

The American evaluation says that the shortage of officers continues to be so severe that "many offices are filled by officers of lower grades than are authorized."

It also sees handling and collection of intelligence and both the planning and execution of logistical operations as serious weaknesses.

In a list of other weaknesses, some that stand out include inadequate housing for soldiers' dependents, who often travel with the unit as much as possible both because of family loyalty and because of low pay which makes it hard to get other housing, unavailability of spare parts for much newly acquired equipment and an inaccurate system of keeping track of how many soldiers the Army has in each category.